

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Parents Get In The Game
Parents Can Play An Active Role in Children's Long-term Health

Getting fit doesn't have to mean spending time away from your children. In fact, being active with children teaches them how to better their health and make regular positive activities a lifetime pursuit.

In recognizing the importance of positive physical and prosocial activity among youth, especially "tweens" between the ages of 9 and 13, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed a national, multicultural campaign called **VERB.™ It's what you do.**

The campaign encourages tweens to increase their physical and prosocial activity to improve their health and displace unhealthy, risky behaviors. VERB also encourages parents to assess their children's physical activity patterns by actively taking interest in children's likes and dislikes and providing them with the appropriate activity programs that mirror their interests. Physical activities are those that require movement that results in energy expenditure. Prosocial activities are those associated with organized groups, such as school clubs, teams, community groups, family or religious, organizations.

“Encouraging a physically active lifestyle among children can be a daunting task for some parents, especially busy parents,” says Mike Greenwell, director of communications for CDC’s chronic disease center. “The VERB program offers parents a variety of choices that are not only easy, but help make physical and group activities a part of every day routines.”

Making It Fun

Family and peer support, or the lack thereof, affects children’s willingness and likelihood to participate in activities. According to Greenwell, children are more likely to continue positive physical or prosocial activity if they enjoy it. Greenwell says that parents can start to support their children’s participation in physical activity by being physically active role models. Parents should try walking to the store, taking family bike rides, and cooking healthy meals.

Family vacations and outdoor adventures provide great settings for parents and children to be active and explore new activities together such as climbing, fishing, playing basketball, and photography. Other outdoor activities include planting flowers in the park, taking an outdoor nature hike, or volunteering to clean up the neighborhood. Local community centers and park districts provide a variety of choices to help parents and children get started. The VERB campaign offers examples fun things to do, helping children discover a wealth of hidden talent for a previously untried activity.

“Getting children out, active and participating in new and different activities helps them build self-esteem, gain confidence, and feel better,” adds Greenwell. “By making activities fun and in synch with children’s personalities, parents can help sustain the VERB movement and encourage children to live a positive healthy lifestyle.”

It is recommended that children participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day, such as biking or playing a musical instrument. Other fun physical and prosocial activities include playing catch, swimming, drawing, dancing, jumping rope, and cheerleading.

Decreasing Screen Time

One key to incorporating physical and group activities into daily routines is to decrease screen time. According to experts, children are spending too much time glued to the screen watching television, playing video games, and surfing the Internet.

“Experts recommend that parents limit children’s total screen time to no more than one to two hours of quality programming per day,” says Greenwell. “By contrast, most children are spending more than six hours in front of a screen.”¹

The VERB program provides parents with a launching pad to get children started toward a healthier lifestyle. It encourages parents to offer children alternative entertainment, including reading, athletics, hobbies and creative play.

Benefits of Physical and Prosocial Activity

Children who are engaged in positive activities are better able to meet the demands of daily physical activity and gain greater self-confidence, school achievements,

¹ Woodward, Emory H., *Media in the Home 2000: The Fifth Annual Survey of Parents and Children*, 2000.

social connectedness, and positive family relationships than their sedentary peers.

Greenwell says that by helping children learn about and enjoy physical activities at a young age, parents are one step closer to helping them lead healthy lifestyles as they grow older.

“The percentage of young people who are overweight (13 percent of children and adolescents were overweight in 1999) has doubled in the past 20 years. That’s why the **VERB.™ It’s what you do.** campaign is so crucial,” adds Greenwell. “As parents help children across the country explore physical and prosocial activities that appeal to their self-interests, we will see healthier children with better self-esteem. Plus, children will be less likely to engage in unhealthy, risky behaviors such as smoking and drinking.”

The VERB campaign aims to help parents teach children about the benefits of healthy living, which include—

- ✓ Building and maintaining healthy bones and muscles
- ✓ Controlling weight, building lean muscle and reducing fat
- ✓ Reducing feelings of depression, stress, and anxiety
- ✓ Promoting psychological well-being, including enhanced feelings of social belongingness and increased self-esteem
- ✓ Increasing flexibility and aerobic endurance

Learn More

VERBparents.com offers parents new ways to become involved with VERB, including information on the benefits of positive activities, tips on increasing participation in physical activities, guidelines on increasing involvement with prosocial

organizations, and suggestions on how to decrease screen time (television, computers and video games). The Web site features an activity calendar that serves as a daily reminder for families to spend quality time together. VERB recommends posting the calendar on the refrigerator or in a visible place for parents and children.

About VERB

The integrated **VERB.™ It's what you do.** campaign uses advertising, marketing, events, and partnership activities to ensure that campaign messages reach children whenever they are looking for something positive to do. Through multicultural media partnerships, the campaign is designed to reach children in all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds — including specific outreach for African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Hispanic/Latinos.

For more information about the campaign see www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign or visit the tween Web site at www.VERBnow.com.

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